

DCF Meets Another Goal

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The state Department of Children and Families still has a way to go before it can meet the 22 performance goals that would free the agency from years of federal court oversight. Even so, DCF generated another impressive quarterly report from federal monitor Raymond Mancuso.

The latest assessment is an encouraging sign that DCF could satisfy all of the outcomes before too long. That's quite a statement to make, when you consider that at one time it was questionable whether the agency would ever fulfill the requirements.

In his most recent report, Mr. Mancuso credits DCF with dramatically reducing its reliance on large residential treatment centers to house Connecticut foster children. More of them are being placed in newly opened group homes, where they can attend regular schools, live in a neighborhood setting and even secure employment.

Two years ago, when the exit-plan reports began, about 14 percent of the state's estimated 6,000 foster children were in residential centers. As of June 30, the figure is down to less than 11 percent, or more than 200 children who are no longer institutionalized.

Back then, DCF had met only four of the 22 goals. Mr. Mancuso's running score sheet now has the agency meeting 15 goals and coming within 3 percentage points of complying with three others. DCF has been under federal court jurisdiction since 1991 as part of a settlement of a class-action lawsuit.

Critics such as Richard Wexler, executive director of the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform, correctly point out that DCF's ultimate objective should be to place every child in a single-family setting, whether with a relative or a foster parent.

Plaintiffs in the original lawsuit, moreover, remain concerned that DCF has yet to meet two major court-ordered targets of developing suitable treatment plans for 90 percent of its foster children and providing better mental and physical health services.

DCF should build on its momentum to reach those goals as soon as possible.

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